



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story and Lessons Learned

Title

Smarter Lunchrooms Movement Nudges Students Towards Healthier Food Choices

Intervention Summary

Children spend most of their time at school, and the school food environment has a significant influence on the foods they consume. The layout of the lunchroom can influence children to make healthier food choices. Smarter Lunchrooms focuses on no-cost and low-cost solutions that can be incorporated into the existing lunchroom to nudge students towards healthier food choices. Smarter lunchrooms interventions are based on behavioral economics, which characterizes how the environment influences our decisions. The goal of this project was to create sustainable, research-based lunchroom strategies to guide students in making smarter, healthier food choices, including increased consumption of fruits and vegetables at Winifred Pifer and Bauer Speck elementary schools in Paso Robles.

The project began with an assessment of the two lunchrooms to identify effective low-cost strategies that could be implemented quickly, with minimum disruption to the lunch periods. A partnership was formed with the food service director at the Paso Robles Culinary Arts Academy. In collaboration with the food service director, lunchroom and administration staff at both sites, the lunchrooms were evaluated using a Smarter Lunchrooms checklist to determine what the schools were doing well and where they could use improvement. Both schools already had a great selection of fruits and vegetables and the assessment indicated that the most appropriate interventions were related to improving signage and presentation of the salad bar.

The first strategy was to make the fruits more attractive by placing them in decorative bowls. The bowls were used for fruits such as apples and sliced oranges, and placed at the beginning of the salad bar so they would be the first thing the students saw as they entered the lunchroom. The second intervention to the salad bar was developing creative names for all the fruits and vegetables featured in the salad bar. Research has shown that giving fruits and vegetables fun, age-appropriate names enhances taste

perception, which works by improving the flavor expectation, causing children to try and consume more fruits and vegetables.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

To implement changes to the school lunchrooms, collaboration was key. Working with Principals, food service directors, and lunchroom staff was the most important element to achieving success. Getting initial buy-in from all stakeholders was a challenge, but this was overcome by focusing on the potential of this project for their schools and their children. Smarter Lunchrooms presents a variety of interventions that can be implemented, however it is important to collaborate with stakeholders to determine which interventions are most appropriate, given each school's unique strengths and limitations. Coordination of this diverse group of stakeholders was also challenging at times, but program directors made a point to meet with each group at several instances over the course of the project to ensure open communication and continued support from a broad base of stakeholders.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The goal of the project was to create sustainable research-based lunchroom strategies to guide students in making smarter, healthier food choices, including increased consumption of fruits and vegetables during lunchtime. This was accomplished by implementing interventions that improved signage and presentation of the salad bar. Sustainability of the Smarter Lunchrooms interventions is vital, and in collaboration with the principals, school lunchroom staff, and teachers at the schools, Smarter Lunchroom strategies will be kept in place. To sustain the interventions, teachers and staff participated in trainings on Smarter Lunchroom's strategies during PTA and staff meetings. It is vital to work with key stakeholders to ensure sustainable interventions are still going strong, after the implementation period is over.

Contact information about this Narrative

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